



Arlington's Commercial Revitalization Initiative



An initiative by the Arlington Redevelopment Board, the Town Manager,
and the Department of Planning and Community Development
to encourage and facilitate street and storefront improvements in Arlington's commercial districts.



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Commercial Revitalization Initiative

One of the primary concerns coming out of the 2007 town visioning sessions and Smart Growth Technical Assistance grant was the vitality of our commercial sector. We have a lot to build on, as evidenced by a recent Boston Globe article rating Arlington as one of the most desirable towns in Massachusetts. The Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB) and Arlington Department of Planning and Community Development (Planning Department) have been working on how to build on what we have, and improve the overall business environment.

Your World

Cars dominate American roadways.
Walkers, bikers and the disabled want more access.
Will a new movement make it happen?

StreetSmart

By Barbara Basler
Collage by Simone Tieber

The small town of Kirkland, Wash., is attracting droves of official visitors from other cities. A leafy suburb of Seattle, Kirkland hugs the shoreline of sparkling Lake Washington and boasts 42 parks, two dozen public sculptures and even a nonprofit coffeehouse (owned by Internet executives) where customers pay only what they want for their lattes and pastries. But it's Kirkland's streets that are the big draw for officials from other towns, towns that want to follow its lead and design public thoroughfares that accommodate all members of the public—not just those who drive. The visitors—from urban centers and sprawling suburbs alike—want to learn how to keep traffic moving without adding new lanes and how to make busy roadways safe for bike riders and walkers. With Americans aging and facing mobility challenges, communities are looking for ways to help residents get around safely. Kirkland accomplishes all this with wide sidewalks, flowered medians and flashing lights embedded in crosswalks at busy intersections. Bike lanes and bus stops line even some of the town's busiest streets. At many corners, pedestrians can pick up a red flag to catch drivers' attention, cross and return the flag to a holder. "We consider walking and biking forms of transportation in Kirkland," explains Deputy Mayor

Completing a Street
Some ideas that work

- 1 Resting places
- 2 Ramps to crosswalks
- 3 Pedestrian-friendly medians
- 4 Visible signs
- 5 Recessed bus stops
- 6 Raised crosswalks
- 7 Advanced stop lines
- 8 Bike lanes
- 9 On-street parking
- 10 Wide, raised sidewalks

22 AARP BULLETIN SEPTEMBER 2007

Source: AARP Bulletin, September 2007

Several years ago, the Redevelopment Board focused on Arlington Heights, and encouraged shop owners to paint and spruce up their establishments while street improvements were being done. We have a similar opportunity to encourage the revitalization of Arlington Center and East Arlington. While extensive street improvements may be some years off, we are pursuing other parts of the initiative now. For example, the Town will upgrade the streetlights and trash receptacles in the Center in the near term, and the ARB has designed a storefront improvement program to assist the business community's merchants, restaurateurs, and other business owners to redesign and improve their signs, display areas, and overall appearance. More details on the storefront improvement program are provided in the pages that follow.

Our streets and public spaces can be considered our public living rooms. All aspects of these "outdoor rooms" affect commercial vitality from landscaping, lighting and street furniture, to storefronts, signage, and parking.



We have identified four areas where we can begin the process of Arlington's commercial revitalization:

- Public Space Improvement
- Storefront Improvement Program
- Signage Quality
- Parking Management



Public Space Improvement

The Public Space Improvement Program will concentrate on improvements to the appearance and livability of the streets and public spaces along the Massachusetts Avenue (Mass. Ave.) corridor, with the objective of improving the design and appearance of our sidewalks, crosswalks, landscaping, sidewalk furniture, and lighting, all of which contribute to the ambiance of the outdoor rooms in our commercial sector both day and night.

Focus Zones

Arlington is remarkable for the great commercial spine of Mass. Ave., a street that is perpetually changing and continues to provide great potential for Arlington business.

Public space design can apply to all the commercial zones of Arlington, including Mass. Ave., Broadway, and Warren Street. In order to concentrate our resources and effectively begin the process, we will concentrate our efforts on two primary commercial focus zones along Mass. Ave.: at Lake Street in East Arlington, and Arlington Center.

Streetscape and Public Space Design

We will concentrate on ways to improve streetscape, lighting, landscape, and general livability of these key public spaces along Mass. Ave. by standardizing street furniture, trash receptacles, news kiosks, benches, and planters. Funding is currently available through the Arlington Department of Public Works (DPW) for new lighting and new, more attractive trash receptacles in Arlington Center.

Mass. Ave. Corridor Project

The Mass. Ave. Corridor Project involves the redesign and re-construction of Mass. Ave. from the Cambridge line through Arlington Center. Phase 1 extends from Cambridge to Pond Lane. The design phase for Phase 1 will begin in 2008. The Planning Dept. and ARB will have close involvement in this project, through a planning committee consisting of representatives from the Board of Selectmen, Transportation Advisory Committee, and Chamber of Commerce, as well as from the ARB.

Arlington Center

The ARB will also initiate interim improvements in Arlington Center as a parallel effort. A landscape architect has been retained to make recommendations on the lighting and trash receptacles for Broadway Plaza. These items will be installed as soon as possible.

Public Signage and Way Finding

The ARB will work with the Department of Public Works to improve traffic and public signage that is in disrepair.

Opportunities for Improvement:



Town-owned planters are overgrown; uncared for, and unattractive.



The town's waste receptacles are broken, unattractive, and difficult to service.



Broadway plaza looks abandoned. The round planter was designed to be a fountain. The plantings are overgrown. Red umbrellas add a colorful element.



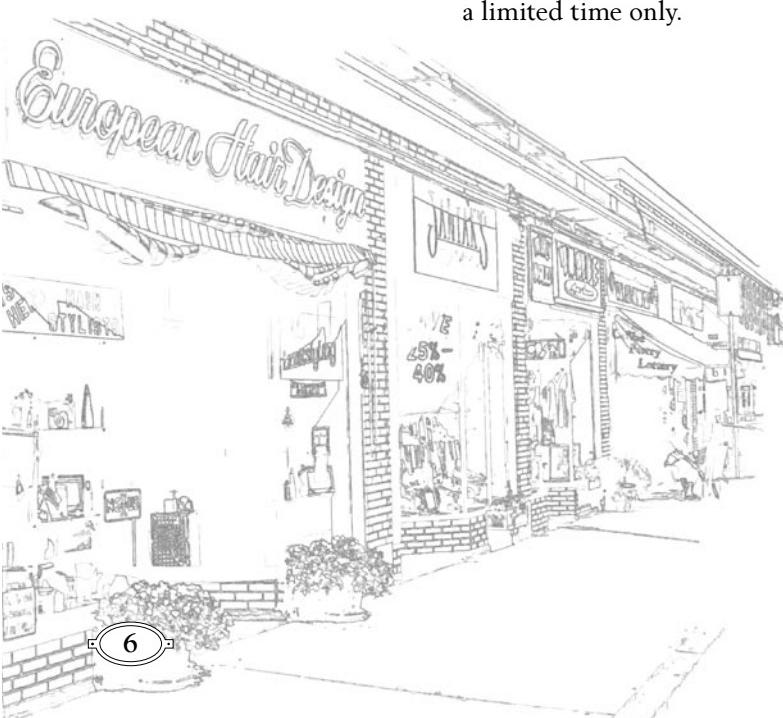
More news boxes – adds to clutter and waste. Street furniture is too light. Another town planter is neglected.

Storefront Improvement Program

The Storefront Improvement Program will provide design assistance to participating business owners to improve the physical appearance and curb appeal of their storefronts. Since the storefronts are the walls of our town's outdoor rooms, the storefronts' appearances are critical to the perception of our streets and public spaces. The Program is not intended to limit individual expression, but rather to encourage the highest quality and most exciting shopping and dining experience. The ARB has surveyed parts of Mass. Ave. to identify particular stores and businesses that would benefit from the design assistance. The ARB is soliciting interest from prospective businesses to make storefront improvements.

No-Cost Design Assistance

The Arlington Redevelopment Board will connect interested business owners with an experienced architect to redesign the signs, lighting, and other architectural details of the storefront, restaurant, or office. The most exciting feature of the Storefront Improvement Program is that the design assistance will be offered to participating merchants at no cost to them. The design fees will be paid by the Town of Arlington through a Community Development Block Grant. These design assistance funds, however, are limited, and thus available for a limited time only.



Plan Approval

Since the architects chosen for this program are familiar with Arlington's zoning bylaw and design guidelines, the business owner will know that the architect's plan will meet local requirements for any applicable permits.

Financial Resources

If financing is required to upgrade the façade, or install new signage and lighting, a number of local banks have made commitments to provide loans at favorable terms to business owners participating in the Storefront Improvement Plan. More details and contact information for the banks are available from the Planning Department.

Examples of storefront improvements:

Before:



India Pavilion: Existing Conditions



Pires Market: Existing Conditions

After:



India Pavilion: Facade Enhancement



Pires Market: Facade Enhancement

Source: Prellwitz Chilinski Associates, Inc.

Signage Quality

Signage design and readability is key to the survival of a commercial enterprise. Commercial signage contributes to the look and feel of storefronts, and in turn our streets and public spaces. Therefore, the ARB intends to improve the quality and attractiveness of commercial signage through several interrelated initiatives.

Sign Sense

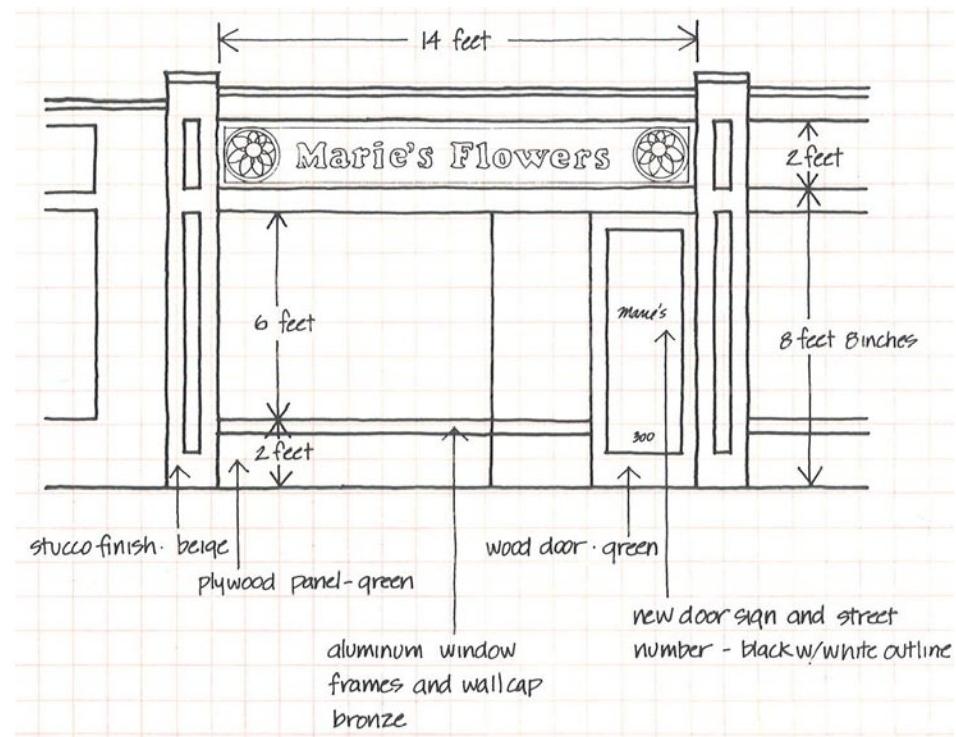
"Sign Sense" is a detailed booklet that describes and gives examples of good, aesthetic sign design specifically oriented to Arlington. Originally written in 1976, "Sign Sense" is in the process of being updated by the Planning Department.

Planning Department Approval

A warrant article for the 2008 Town Meeting seeks increased control of signage by the Planning Department, thus helping to ensure that signs comply with the bylaw, while following recommended designs as closely as possible.

Bylaws

Other bylaw amendments submitted by the ARB for the 2008 Town Meeting propose to allow for greater individual expression by the use of a broader range of signs, including neon signs that are truly artistic and bracket signs (signs installed perpendicular to the face of a building), while also providing greater control over temporary signs.



"Sign Sense" provides information on signage guidelines for Arlington.

Parking Management

Adequate and convenient parking is a primary concern of business owners and their customers. We want to encourage all types of transportation and access: pedestrian, bicycle, bus, and other public transit. Nevertheless, vehicular access continues to be the main source of access to most businesses. Thus, the parking management program will seek ways to more effectively utilize our parking resources.

Parking Initiatives

The ARB is exploring “shared parking” initiatives to utilize existing town owned and private parking facilities in cooperative arrangements.

We will also:

- study parking regulations, off hours use of private lots, and Saturday use patterns;
- investigate the use of metering; and,
- encourage off-site employee parking.



Too many signs – threatening, overwhelming

Bylaws

A bylaw amendment to be considered by the 2008 Town Meeting proposes to permit parking requirements to be met by off-site parking spaces, thereby making better use of on-site spaces. Another proposed by-law amendment would permit restaurants to provide seasonal outdoor seating without requiring a corresponding increase in the number of parking spaces provided.



Sunrise lot



Jamin Java / Anton's parking



Broadway Plaza parking

Expanding the Revitalization Initiative

The Commercial Revitalization Initiative is a continuing process intended to improve the business climate in Arlington, and to enhance the appearance of Arlington's commercial districts. This process goes far beyond improving the public spaces of the town and the appearances of Arlington's storefronts.

Future aspects of the Initiative include:

- Studying the right mix of businesses for the town, attracting new business, and realizing the potential of Arlington's hidden treasures.
- Working in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce to market Arlington's commercial strengths and potential.
- Celebrating Arlington's distinctive business centers with local programs in East Arlington, Arlington Center and Arlington Heights.
- Studying the use of Business Improvement Districts and zoning overlay districts that will lead to continuing private investment in Arlington's commercial districts.



We want your participation...

The ARB and the Planning Department view this Initiative as an evolving process that will develop and change over time as new challenges and opportunities arise. In addition to the Town's planning effort and the participation of the local business community, we also need to hear the response and suggestions of Arlington's citizens and other representatives, and welcome everyone's participation.

The ARB and the Planning Department are looking for input. We will be working with the Selectmen, the Town Manager, Department of Public Works, Building Inspector, Transportation Advisory Committee, Chamber of Commerce, and the many merchants and businesses of Arlington. We hope to leverage resources and donations from the public sector and businesses who can help the Commercial Revitalization Initiative. We welcome all suggestions for making Arlington's Commercial Revitalization Initiative a success.

If you have suggestions or want to be part of the program, contact:

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